

The Forty-nine

For the Tree of Hope planting at Coton Orchard

On Great Whin Sill, in a glacial scar,
A whip spread out its eager roots
Through ground processed by countless boots,
Thin branches framing sky and star.

*History streams through rising sap,
Through the sycamore tree that found a gap,
Found a gap.*

Like nature, we abhor a void:
The eye delights to find the tree
Whose branches tame infinity,
And each by each transformed.

*Ground and figure overlap:
The Sycamore Tree is the Sycamore Gap,
The Sycamore Gap.*

The guardian of this great north wall
Rose to monumental fame.
Cartographers would bless the name –
The star of screens both big and small.

*Known by word of mouth and map,
The eponymous Sycamore in the Gap,
More in the Gap.*

But come the fall, foul thieves betray.
They drive through night to get their kick.
The lone tree feels the chainsaw's lick:
Centuries' work for moments' play.

*The wind howls over the final snap,
And deep is the wound in the Whin Sill gap,
In the Whin Sill gap.*

Rewind, rewind the grainy film!
A nation wails; the land's in spasm;
The treasured gap a gaping chasm.
Who can stay this shaken realm?

*We turn our face and take the slap;
We feel the ache; we mind the gap,
We mind the gap.*

September's corpse was strewn with wings,
And forty-nine saw burial –
One for every foot that fell,
And now a fledgling forest springs.

*Days grow long and seasons lap.
Warm breezes whistle through the gap,
Through the gap.*

Against the wanton tide we race.
And so the forty-niners fly:
Brave, they go as single spies,
Each taking resurrection grace.

*We plant our hope, feel rising sap,
And we'll stand fast in the Sycamore Gap.
We will rise, we will stand in the gap.*

Debbie Whitton Spriggs

The Sycamore Gap Tree was a much-loved landmark at Hadrian's Wall. 'Tree of the Year' in 2016, it was also known as the 'Robin Hood Tree' because of its appearance in the 1991 film. It was felled in an act of vandalism in September 2023. After the theft of this national treasure, the vandals' own fuzzy phone footage of the act helped secure their conviction.

In the 'Trees of Hope' initiative, 49 saplings – one for each foot of the tree's height – are being sent out as gifts to communities around the country. Nearly 500 applications were made, and Coton Orchard is one of two sites in this county selected to receive a Tree of Hope.

www.footpathpress.com
www.cotonorchard.com

National Trust
Trees of Hope

